

Sermon: What are we storing up in heaven for eternity

Reading: Matthew 25:14-30

Introduction:

We probably all know someone who had the opportunity to retire from work early on final salary pension which means they can live comfortably in their retirement years. We probably also know those who wished they had been more diligent in their younger years to pay into a pension in preparation for their retirement. Even though we know if we live long enough one day we will reach pension age but we never really give it much thought when we are young. Although we know its coming, its too far away to consider it today. But as the years seem to quicken the older we get, we soon approach the end of our career more quickly than we ever expected.

Here is an interesting though, 'What are we sending on ahead of us for our eternal future in the heavenly kingdom? Or are we only thinking about today?'

Context:

Chapters and verses in Scripture are a blessing, as it's so much easier to find passages because of these number breaks, however this is one of those times when the chapter breaks create an unintended separation in the text when it would have been much better to let them run together. The parable that ends chapter 24 when Jesus speaks about the Day and time unknown is more helpful when read alongside the first two parables of chapter 25. Although these three parables seem very different they do have a common theme linking all three of these together. Read them and see if you can spot the theme?

1. The Day and the hour unknown (**Matt 24:36-5**)
2. The Parable of the wise and foolish virgins (**Matt 25: 1-13**)
3. The Parable of the talents (**Matt 25:14-30**)

What is the parable about?

In the three parables the illustration is about one who is returning but at an unknown time and hour and the focus is on the behaviours and attitudes of those waiting. Each of the parables highlight the faulty thinking and attitudes each has in response to the time the master/bridegroom is away and late coming.

In the first parable the contrast is between wicked and faithful servants who are either mistreating their masters household, abusing their positions and acting world and they are caught out when the master returns sooner than expected! The wickedness of the people is linked to the OT, 'Just like in the days of Noah' (**Matt 24:37**).

Likewise in the second parable we find a bridegroom is late in coming for the wedding feast. Jesus speaks of the attitude of the wise and foolish bridesmaids we find upon his return. Five of them are wise and prepared while five are un-prepared and foolish and have no oil in their lamps. The oil refers to the Holy Spirit.

So it becomes obvious, whenever the subject of The Lord's return is raised, we are to consider carefully our attitude to the way we are living our life today. The first parable the servants become worldly and wicked, just like the days of Noah, thinking the Lord was not returning. The second characters in the parable of the ten bridesmaids/virgins were a mixture of Spirit filled and nominal Christians who were either wise in their walk of faith with the Lord and filled with the Holy Spirit or were unwise and luke warm in their response to Jesus which meant they found themselves unprepared for the arrival of the bridegroom.

Finally in the third of this set of parables the same theme is followed, when the master of the house returns, he calls his servants before him to give an account. Placing all three together we discover the Christian is to be....

1. Faithful and expectant, living in hope of the arrival at any time of Jesus
2. Vigilant in our waiting, patient and awake, filled with the Holy Spirit
3. Diligent and at work, fulfilling the commission and commands Jesus has given to us.

Called to Serve:

Focussing on today's parable we may find the language of servant difficult to digest and may prefer to speak of ourselves as volunteers rather than being servants. Volunteers however usually offer their free time, when convenient, however when we contrast this with the role of a servant we see the expectations and demands are very different.

Servant is the word used in translation of the Greek word *doulos*, which literally means slave or bondservant. God's call on our lives is much more akin to that of servant than volunteer. As Christians we are not called to volunteer but to serve. Paul refers to himself as a servant of Jesus Christ (**Rom 1:1; Col 4:12; 1 Tim 4:6**). But in other passages Paul more often refers to himself with the much stronger term of *doulos* which is closer to slave. Consider Jesus' half brother, Jude who also does the same, referring to himself not as brother or friend but as a slave of Jesus Christ. The way we view ourselves in this relationship as Christians is important. Maybe if more considered themselves as slaves and servants we wouldn't find it as difficult to fulfil the many roles in our churches and chapels!

The word slave has such negative connotations in our culture but if we are honest we recognise we actually can become slaves to anything which has master over us. Some become slaves to fashion, others to the workplace and others to their hobbies and interests and vices such as smoking, drinking, over eating etc. Whatever masters us we become its servant. The joy of being a slave of Jesus is His Lordship over us is not oppressive, for His burden is easy and His yoke is light. This means we have a loving response in return as we recognise we are indebted to Him for He rescues us saving our eternal souls. This makes serving Christ a joy as He invites us to work and receive the joy and happiness which His work brings. Consider the words of the Psalmist, 'The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in Him' (**Ps 37:23**).

So our parable begins with a man going on a journey who calls his servants and entrusts his wealth to them. He gives to each of his servants according to their ability. To one he gives 5 talents of gold, to another he gives two and to another still he gives one. The master is wise and knows what each is capable of and sets them the task and challenge accordingly. A talent of gold is not monetary coinage but refers to a weight, as each person was given a substantial amount of gold belonging to their master. (**Matt 25:14-15**).

I like the response of the two servants, they wasted no time in setting to work with their masters interests at heart. For Jesus says they went out immediately, straight away in order to put to work all that their master had entrusted to them. The diligence of the faithful and hardworking servants was repaid when they were called to give an account. Both managed to double their masters investments, a 100% return. How excited they must have been, eager to share this news with their master. For these faithful servants were working diligently with all that the master had entrusted to them. How excited and longing they must have been for their master to return so they can share all they had done.

As accounts were given we hear the master was thrilled by their hard work and diligence during his absence. So much so he responds with high praise calling them faithful servants

and invites them to share in his joy and participate in the fruits of their labour in all that was gained and achieved.

What is clear in each of these parables is that Jesus is returning, at a time and hour that is unexpected and it will be a day of reckoning when accounts will be given, audited and made! How does this thought affect us when we think about our duties, roles and responsibilities within His Church. Please note - this is not meant to put the faithful, vigilant and diligent on a guilt trip, but to awaken the lazy, slothful and slacking nominal from their stupor to get ready, be prepared and get stuck in to the masters work and commission of His people the Church.

Great White Throne

The book of Revelation speaks of the day that is to come when all people will stand before the throne of God which is described as a Great White Throne. John describes what he sees saying, "And I saw the dead, great and small standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire' (**Rev 20**"12-15).

It is clear from the New Testament teachings of Jesus there is coming a Day of judgment which will come upon the world, and every person, no matter how great or small, influential or un-influential, rich or poor, atheist or believer, will one day stand before God to give an account. For those who prefer to think there is no judgment or a place called hell, you have to wrestle with Jesus own words because everything we know about judgment and hell comes from His teachings.

The lazy servant in the parable who did no work but buried the talents of gold (out of sight out of mind) had the audacity to confront his master and blame him for his predicament. How many times have I heard people judge and blame God for things in life and the world? This servant was wicked indeed, he deflected the accusation of being lazy from himself to confronting and challenging the master saying he is a hard man and reaps where he did not sow etc.

I find it troubling how Spirit filled Christians can look at God and see a wonderful, amazing, beautiful, benevolent, patient, generous and loving God who is righteous in all his ways and holy. Many have given up much to follow the ways of the master and delight as they walk in close fellowship with Him. And at the same time others want to confront God and complain, accusing Him of wrong doing, injustice and wickedness and want nothing to do with Him and have only hatred and contempt for Him. My only conclusion for this is that people loved darkness and prefer not to come into the light for their deeds may be exposed (**John 3:19-20**). This dichotomy of opinions also fulfils the first prophecy in Scripture which we find in the book of Genesis, which says, there will be enmity between the seed of the woman (Jesus followers) and the seed of Satan (**Gen 3:15**). We either belong to the Father of heaven or the father of lies (**Jn 8:44**). Paul writes about the reaction the world has to followers of Jesus in this way, 'For we are to God the sweet aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other an aroma that brings life' (**2 Cor 2:15-16**)

Even the believers (true Christians) will appear before Jesus on a Day of reckoning but it will not be us who will be judged but our works. Paul writes about it in the First letter to the

Corinthians speaking about what we have used to build on the foundation of the gospel, he says, "If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved - even though only as one escaping through the flames' (1 Cor 3:12-15).

This passage leads us back to the question at the beginning - what will the Day reveal about how we have worked in the Lord's service. What have we been using to build with, have we been storing up treasures in heaven for that coming day (a bit like our retirement saving plan idea) and what will remain? Will we enter the heavenly kingdom to the words welcome faithful servant, join with me in celebrating with joy of the rewards or will we be left ashamed, thinking I have not built anything or I was never generous and committed, as I only ever built with straw, hay and stubble! Are we generous, faithful, wise and vigilant, servants who are diligent in all we do and with all God has gifted us with?

For the parables Jesus presents to us are sobering when we consider the consequences because the wicked who act like the world, the foolish who have no spirit or the lazy who built nothing, investing nothing for the kingdom and give very little to the family of God will have their accounts audited on that Day which we all will one day stand.

Summary.

Recently I was preaching on the resurrection to eternal life and after the service was over my eye was drawn to the memorial book which is placed in the porch. On that particular day of the service the inscription read, (Name) passed away this morning and she was excited! What a great reaction to have, as we say goodbye to this world and enter the kingdom of heaven, to be in the eternal presence of Jesus Christ. For we have heard much about Him, sang His praises and are aware of His nail scarred hands where our name is inscribed. What joy there will be when we hear the words, 'Welcome faithful servant, come and enter my joy'. However for these who are 'Bible despisers, prayer neglecters, sabbath breakers, unbelieving and sensual, earthly minded, the thoughtless, covetous, self indulgent who bury their talents and think they are righteous' (words from JC Ryle), this is going to be a terrible Day. But for those who trust in Jesus and have served Him faithfully, vigilantly, and diligently what joy awaits when the books are opened and our names are found written in the pages of the Book of Life.

O what joy shall fill my heart when at last I see my Lord, my God and my King. Use your life now and your talents to build for an eternity. The wages in this world may not offer the best return but be that good cheer as the eternal pension is tremendous. For we will be entrusted with much more in His kingdom - for there will always be work for us to do.

Amen